



THE CONNECTICUT PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, INC.

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March 16, 2009

Senator Slossberg, Representative Spallone, and members of the Government Administration and Election Committee:

I'm Dr. Michael Schwarzschild, Director of Professional Affairs for the Connecticut Psychological Association. I'm here to provide testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 839, *An Act Concerning Mergers and Consolidation of Certain State Agencies*, and in support of retaining Connecticut's Office of the Child Advocate.

No can argue that these aren't extraordinarily difficult financial times, and that extraordinary measures are required to address them. The State of Connecticut must tighten its belt by prioritizing its services, eliminating those that are unnecessary in favor of supporting those that are required, and it must find new sources of income. For example, consideration is now being given to raising professional licensing fees. I can assure you that I fully expect to hear from all 600 members of my Association in this regard, and none of them will be calling to share their joy with me! But, given the alternatives, I'd sincerely prefer to try to convince my Association's members to tighten their own belts rather than having Jeanne Milstein's position, the Office of the Child Advocate, eliminated.

The Child Advocate is a fully independent ombudsman for children's services in Connecticut. She cannot be replaced by the Attorney General, for whom I have great respect, but who, as the state's attorney, is also called upon to defend state agencies. Without Jeanne Milstein, you and I would not know about the surprisingly large number of Connecticut's children who have been sent out-of-state for foster care, and the steps that are being taken to eliminate this shameful problem. You and I would not know the details related to the untimely deaths of 532 children in Connecticut last year. You and I would not have information about what happened to the young women who were living at Long Lane when it closed. We would not have the Child Advocate's investigation of every significant event and critical incident involving the Department of Children and Families, the systematic oversight and monitoring that has led to significant improvements in that department. Nor would we have the investigations of Stonington Institute, Lake Grove at Durham, Riverview Hospital, Connecticut Juvenile Training School, Haddam Hills Academy, and Douglas House. With all that he and his staff have to do, would Attorney General Blumenthal have sufficient time to protect the children with disabilities who are in state care or who are associated with state agencies? Would he work with DCF to insure voluntary mental health care for the state's children? Will he be able to respond to the 465 citizen concerns or complains about individual children that the Child Advocate deals with each year?



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In the spirit of full disclosure, I am privileged to have a seat on the Child Advocate's Advisory Board. I sit with the Honorable Christine Keller, chief administrative judge of Connecticut's juvenile division, as well as with a pediatric physician, a school administrator, an attorney, and representatives of child-oriented programs in the state. We meet quarterly and, additionally, by telephone or email when required. I am awed by the accomplishments of my fellow panel members, all of whom are volunteers. Why do we serve? It is not because we enjoy looking for parking spaces in the LOB garage! It is, rather, because of the tremendous respect that we have for Jeanne Milstein and her staff, and their untiring efforts to improve the lives of one of Connecticut's most vulnerable populations. It is because we want to help her to do her necessary and important work.

I understand that cuts need to be made, and that your constituents will voice strong opinions about which ones. I certainly don't look forward to paying higher, professional licensing fees and dealing with those complaints from my Association's members. But I look forward less to the negative impact on our children that the elimination of the Office of the Child Advocate would bring about. I urge you to vote for Connecticut's children by voting against Senate Bill 839, *An Act Concerning Mergers and Consolidation of Certain State Agencies*.